

New Act Undermines Safety of Consumers- March 8, 2006

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Rule on H.R. 4167, the National Food Uniformity Act

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The bill before us addresses a fictional problem. Simply put, the nation's largest food companies think states are giving consumers too much information about the food they feed to their families.

Along with the corporate lobbyists who wrote this bill, they think it is wrong that states tell people when the bottled water on their supermarket shelves has high levels of arsenic.

They think it is wrong to inform pregnant women that eating mercury-laden fish could do serious damage to their developing child.

And what about letting people know that their ground beef was treated with carbon monoxide? That, apparently, is wrong, too.

They want us to buy more, and think less about our health and safety. That, and that alone, is the motivation behind the National Food Uniformity Act.

Supporters of this bill claim that all they want is to make consumer protections the same for all Americans. But they just aren't being honest.

The bill's intent is simple. Most states give their citizens more information about their food than the Food and Drug Administration requires. In fact, 80 percent of the food safety work performed in the United States is done by state and local officials...

...officials with the expertise and on-the-ground experience needed to keep our consumers safe.

And they are doing an excellent job.

But this law will allow the FDA to invalidate state food labeling laws and apply its own, lower standards nation-wide.

The consequences of this bill will come quickly, and they will be drastic.

Within a matter of months, more than 200 state food safety laws will be wiped off the books.

In the wake of this disaster, experienced state health officials will be forced to come to Washington, hat in hand, and plead with FDA bureaucrats to keep food safety laws in place that their own legislators and citizens have already established.

They will need to seek approval from an agency that, thanks to the Bush Administration, can't keep us safe anymore...

...an agency that can't meet its current workload, and that recently approved several drugs which have turned out to be dangerous.

Suddenly, the Party of states rights and of small government wants to forget about both. Instead, it wants to send quality state regulations protecting Americans into a bureaucratic black hole.

M. Speaker, the people and organizations most concerned about the safety of our nation's food stand in strong opposition to this bill.

Attorneys general, and public health and safety officials from around the country, have come out against it.

In fact, the Association of Food and Drug Officials recently wrote a letter to Representative Rogers of Michigan, the sponsor of the Act, asking him to reconsider his own legislation. It said, and I quote:

"Members of the AFDO are state and local governments with no profit motive, merely a public health concern who feel strongly that the legislation, if enacted will gravely impair state and local authorities' ability to protect their constituents."

M. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to insert this letter in the Record.

As is often the case, the bill before us does more than provide just another example of how private interests trump the public good in today's Congress. It also shows just how broken and undemocratic our political process has become.

The Commerce Committee that wrote this bill, and the House leadership that supported it, hid from accountability and real debate at every turn.

No public hearings were held on this legislation. No state and local public health officials were called in to testify about it. Both the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture and the Association of Food and Drug Officials expressed their willingness to talk to Congress about this issue.

They were turned away.

These dedicated public servants were ignored because this legislation could never have withstood proper scrutiny. It was written with special interests in mind, not the public interest - pure and simple.

Last year, when the people of our nation started to understand just how much their interests were being sold out, and just how corrupt this Congress was, they were incensed.

The Majority pledged honest and immediate reform. And yet here we are, in a new year - and nothing has changed.

I challenge my friends in the Majority to live up to their word and their responsibility to the people who elected them. I challenge them to be able to look their constituents in the eye and tell them they have acted in their best interest.

We need an open and democratic process in this House.

We need to stop passing bills that treat the public interest with contempt.

And we need to start today.

I urge my colleagues to oppose this bill, and to support a new day in our Congress.

